

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

modern history of Iran is largely a history of Big-Power rivalry. Owing to this fact, Iran during the past century and a half has often appeared to be a pawn of international diplomacy. In the great struggle for influence in Iran two forces seem to have been permanent throughout the nineteenth and a good part of the twentieth century, namely, Russia and Britain. Other great Powers appeared like meteors, outshone temporarily the brightness of two constant stars, but soon faded into oblivion. Such was the case of Napoleonic France in the beginning of the nineteenth century and of Imperial Germany one hundred years later.

The ancient Empire of Iran entered modern world politics around 1800 when Napoleon undertook gigantic schemes to destroy England. Convinced that England's doom must be preceded by French domination of the East, Bonaparte launched a hazardous adventure in Egypt and planned the conquest of India. His negotiations with Tsar Paul of Russia in 1801 ended in a scheme of joint invasion of India by French and Russian forces, the former to traverse the Black and Azov seas, the Don and Volga rivers, and the Caspian Sea and to march through Iran. The plan was only partially carried out. Tsar Paul gave orders to Ataman Orlov to lead a Cossack expedition through the Turkoman steppe. The expedition, because of inade-

quate preparations, proved a failure, and the subsequent death of the Tsar put an end to the scheme. Napoleon's grand strategy, however, still envisaged Iran as an important factor. He tried to establish a military alliance with the Shah as an instrument of his anti-British or anti-Russian policy. The Franco-Iranian Treaty of Finkenstein in 1807 was the apogee of French influence in Iran. A mission headed